

A
 REVIEW
 OF THE
 STATE
 OF THE
 BRITISH NATION.

Saturday, March 26. 1709.

WE are now come to a Bill for erecting a New *African* Company, I was going to call it a new-fashion'd Company—I shall make no Reflections upon what a *House of Commons* pleases to do—They are Magnipotent—Tho' not Omnipotent—However the Bill is not yet debated, and therefore it is not yet calling in question, the Transactions of the *House*, to enter a little into the Case, as it seems to represent itself in that Bill—Besides, the *House* has order'd the Bill to be printed, which seems to me to infer, that every Body is at Liberty to look into it, and give their Judgement with due Respect, and Deference to the *House*, concerning it.

To avoid then the Circumlocution, which might be otherwise of some Use in this Affair, I crave leave to name a few Things, which so far as I may be allow'd to give my Judgment, are wrong both in this Bill, and in all the particular Applications I have seen about it.

First, here is an establish'd Company loaded with Reproaches, but no Crime proved upon them; Clamour and Hurry bears them down like a Winter Flood, they are charg'd with Treason, Piracy and Robbery—But these Charges not form'd into an Accusation, which ought to be attended with Proof of Fact, and follow'd with Conviction and Punishment if guilty, or a Discharge and Satisfaction for the Inju-

ry if clear—— On the other hand these Charges are suggested only, and no otherwise prosecuted than as they have their End, which is to dress up the Company in the Wild-Beasts Skin, the better to get them worry'd by the universal Clamour of the People.

I am no more for this present Company being establish'd than another, their Circumstances do not permit the Thought, neither do they themselves seek it; but I speak impartially, unbiass'd, and I am sure perfectly unprejudic'd, it is my real Sentiment in this Case, that the Trade cannot be maintain'd and preserved to the Nation by the Regulation now propos'd; if the Parliament think otherwise, I have nothing to do with that—— Let the Issue be left to Time to discover.

It is certain, and the Parliament concurs in it, that the Trade is necessary to this Nation——It is then equally necessary that it should be preserv'd, and no Body of Men ought to be vested with the Power of this Trade that do not, much less that cannot give the Nation Security that the Trade shall be preserved—— And after all that has been said of this Part, yet, I do not see in this Bill one Word of giving any Assurance to the Nation for that Purpose, which I doubt not the *House* will consider of—— They alledge, I know, the Trade it self is a Security, and that an exclusive Company cannot give Security, but this seems to be a Mistake; for an exclusive Company may by their Charter be oblig'd to trade to a certain Degree, which the other cannot; and as on the Bulk of their Trade depends the Stock to be rais'd, so on that Bulk also depends the Maintaining of the Settlements, which, while all Men are left at Liberty to trade or no, is left precarious and uncertain; and this, I say, should not be.

But to leave that, The next Thing is the Forts and Castles belonging to the Company in *Africa*—— Great Pains have been taken by the separate Traders, first to prove they were not necessary, and that the Trade might be carry'd on without them—— But that failing, and their own Witnesses owning the Necessity of them; The next

Thing is to lessen the Value of them, and lessen the Number of them; *first*, they tell us they are sorry Things, in no Posture of Defence, of no great Value, nor requiring any great Charge to support them—— And, *secondly*, they are more in Number than there is need of.

Now the End of all this seems to be answer'd in the Bill which is so worded, as to oblige the Company to sell them to their Enemies—— I confess, this has some Hardships in it, that, I cannot believe, was ever yet put upon any Subject by any Parliament—— And I cannot think will be done by this—— It is the undoubted Right and Privilege of an *English* Man, as ancient as *Magna Charta*, and founded on the great Article of *English* Liberty, that no Man can be legally dispossessed of his Freehold without his Consent—— I am not saying what a Parliament can or cannot do—— But if Parliaments come to extend their Power to the taking away the Freeholds of the People, they will act in a Way I do not remember any Precedent for.

It is not enough to say they shall have a Payment, an Equivalent for it—— But why should any Man, if we are a Nation of Liberty, where Justice, Right, and the Freedom of the Subject is kept entire, be forc'd to sell his Possession?

Now the Forts and Castles of the *African* Company are their Freehold, their Power to erect, fortifie and defend them, is unquestion'd; they have their Power from a Legal Hand, the Crown, confirm'd by Parliament—— If they have done any thing to forfeit their Possessions, try them and convict them, and then disable them as you please—— But the same *Magna Charta* says, every Crime charged on the Freeholder shall be try'd by a Jury of Freeholders, and no Man shall forfeit, who is not legally convicted of a Crime: To oblige the Company to sell their Forts and Castles to their Rivals against their Consent, seems to be what I profess, I wonder any Man could ask an *English* Parliament to grant.

Again, suppose they will part with them—— They are their own, and they ought to be Judge of the Consideration which shall be paid them—— And this seems highly reasonable—— The Company's Enemies have

have warmly argued, that there is no need of them—Why then should they desire to have them? If a Man has Goods at Market, it is his just Privilege to determine the Value; if then you will buy, it is but reasonable the Seller should judge of the Price—Because this Liberty is still left the Buyer, that if he likes not the Price, he need not buy.

But to tell us first the Goods are of no Use to you, and next that they are little worth—And then say, but you will make us sell them—Pray, good People, what Sort of Trading do you call this, and pray, Gentlemen, what is become of *English* Liberty all this while? It is true, that in Cases of Dearth and Famine, Farmers and Engrossers of Provisions have been commanded to sell their Corn or other Provisions, and the Price has been adjusted by the Magistrate; but those Cases admit of a great many valuable enforcing Arguments—I never knew that a Man was oblig'd by Parliament to sell his Freehold, whether he would or no; and then to refer the Price too to an Arbitration, *Anglicæ, an Appraisement*—In which the Walls and Houses no doubt are to be valued, as in Appraisements is usual, not by their Usefulness or real Cost, but as Stones and Mortar, Iron and Timber.

Methinks, Gentlemen, if you are upon such severe Terms with the Company, and you will have them sell their Forts and Castles whether they will or no, it is but reasonable to come to one of these two Terms with them—Either give them what they value them at, or give them leave to sell them to those that will, and I shall not be afraid to explain my self—The separate Traders have spoken very slightly of the Company's Forts, they say, they are Trifles good for little, and they can carry on the Trade without them—Now, Gentlemen, if you can trade without them, and they are of so little Consequence, pray let them alone, and be the Company's Advocates with the Parliament for Leave to set them up to Sale, and let the highest Bidder take them; this is but fair trading Law—The Forts are *useful*, or they are not; they are *necessary*, or they

are not; the Trade *depends upon them*, or it does not; and they are worth 150000*l.* or they are not; all this will be try'd by the Method I am proposing; let them up to Sale, if the *Dutch* or the *Portuguese* will give the Money for them, and you will not let them have them, for *GOD's* Sake, Gentlemen *Separate Traders*, don't turn Pirates in the Infancy of your new Company, whatever you do hereafter; to make the Company sell you their Forts and Factories for 40000, or for 4000*l.* as some had the Conscience to talk, and if the Company may at the same time have 150000*l.* for them of the *Dutch*, pray what is this but Robbery and Theft, tho' you are striving to get a Cover to it by Parliamentary Sanction?

The *Dutch*, you will allow, are no Fools not easily cheated, and least of all of their ready Money—Yet I am fully perswaded, the *Dutch* or the *Portuguese* will gladly take off the Company's Settlements at the Price mention'd, and perhaps much higher; and I cannot but think, the Company have a Right to sell them, if you will not give them a valuable and reasonable Consideration for them, to any Body else that will.

It is an unusual Dialect, I must confess, in *England*, at least since *Liberty* has been restor'd among us; I say, it seems a new Dialect to talk of taking Mens Property from them without their Consent—And force a Price upon them, whether it be a just Consideration or no—And tho' I think there is no Danger of the *House of Commons* consenting to such a Hardship, yet, as we say, it is ne'er the worse meant; and I must own, I wonder how any *English* Man, that has a Sense of Honesty and a Sense of Liberty, as I know some of those Gentlemen have, could make such a Proposal to the *House*.

And then pray, Gentlemen, who is it you are so ready to crush? Who does this Loss fall upon? Is it the Company, who indeed we talk very cursorily of? And to that I shall say nothing; they that won't be civil, will be uncivil—But are there not above 800 Families, and among them Widdows, Orphans, decay'd Tradesmen, and the like, who are Creditors for above 300000*l.* upon Bond to the Company.

Stock—